History of ARS National Programs

Through a series of national visioning conferences in the mid-1990s a new model for managing the ARS research portfolio emerged. National Programs coordinate research across locations and disciplines, where before national efforts were *ad hoc*. The National Programs changed the nature of communication and collaboration among program managers, line managers, and scientists in ARS.

http://arsnet.usda.gov/NPHandbook.html

ARS National Programs

- Human Nutrition
- Food Safety
- Quality and Utilization of Agricultural Products
- Food Animal Production
- Animal Health
- Veterinary, Medical, and Urban Entomology
- Aquaculture
- Climate Change, Soils, and Emissions
- Pasture, Forage & Rangeland Systems
- Manure and Byproduct Utilization
- Water Availability and Watershed Management
- Agricultural System Competitiveness and Sustainability
- Bioenergy
- Plant Genetic Resources, Genomics and Genetic Improvement
- Plant Biological and Molecular Processes
- Plant Diseases
- Crop Protection and Quarantine
- Crop Production
- Methyl Bromide Alternatives

ARS Mission

The Agricultural Research Service conducts research to develop and transfer solutions to agricultural problems of high national priority and provides information access and dissemination to:

- ensure high-quality, safe food and other agricultural products;
- assess the nutritional needs of Americans;
- sustain a competitive agricultural economy; and
- enhance the natural resource base and the environment, and provide economic opportunities for rural citizens, communities, and society as a whole.

USDA ARS

National Program Handbook

http://arsnet.usda.gov/NPHandbook.html

September 2009

National Program Handbook

The National Program Handbook was developed by the Office of National Programs to document best practices in the management of ARS research, at both the project and program level. The Handbook takes a close look at our program cycle and lays out roles and responsibilities in each phase of the cycle, describing both what we do and why we do it.

The Handbook resulted from interactions between the Office of National Programs and the Area Offices. Because ARS manages its research as a matrix, combining national priority setting with Area- managed excellence of research, the Handbook was developed to serve as a clearing-house for **best practices** across the matrix related to program and project management in ARS. While it is not a policy and procedures document, the Handbook does relay who is accountable for what in managing ARS research.

The internal and external processes described in the Handbook highlight the ways in which ARS ensures the quality, relevance, and impact of research.

National Program Cycle

The management of all ARS National Programs is conceptualized in the National Program Cycle, consisting of four phases (**Input, Planning, Implementation, and Assessment**) that take place over a 5-year cycle. The Handbook is divided into four sections corresponding to those four phases described here.

Input

In the first phase of the National Program cycle, the National Program Leaders, working through multi-disciplinary National Program teams, define and articulate the scope of each program considering input from customers, stakeholders, partners, and ARS scientists. The prime mechanism used by the National Program team to seek input is through stakeholder workshops at the start of each program cycle or through technical and commodity-specific workshops throughout the program cycle. Input is also actively solicited by the program leaders through professional relationships with the Administration, other federal agencies, national, regional, and local customer and stakeholder organizations, and partners.

Planning

Using the input gathered, National Program Leaders guide ARS scientists in developing a Nation Program Action Plan to define the ARS program and provide broad scientific direction for a five-year time frame. Action Plans state the high priority problems that ARS research will address and identify the actions ARS will take to solve those problems in a coordinated effort. They serve as the central reference for defining program relevance and performance. These plans are used to assign more specific program direction to field scientists for development of project plans, which are then peer reviewed for scientific quality through a rigorous external process.

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Implementation

Research is implemented at ARS' 100+ locations across the Nation and the world, with direct oversight provided by Area Directors, Center or Laboratory Directors, and Research Leader at a location. National Program Leaders have an ongoing coordination role, monitoring and demonstrating performance at the program level through annual project and program reports. New funds received by ARS mid-program cycle are allocated by the National Program Leader. Annual resource management and spending plans are developed through line management. Personnel and project performance are also monitored annually through line management.

Assessment

This section describes how the A National Program's performance is assessed every 5 years by an external panel of customers and stakeholders. Research results are held up against the research goals, products, and outcomes identified at the outset of the program in the National Program Action Plan. The assessment provides feedback to customers, partners, and stakeholders on accomplishments, measures of efficacy to program managers, focus and feedback to scientists, and performance measures to Congress, the Administration and other interested parties.